

## Toward Authenticity or Defeat: The Jolting Effect of Layoff

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# Toward Authenticity or Defeat: The Jolting Effect of Layoff

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The last decade has brought with it unprecedented change – not all of it good. The recent economic downturn has damaged organizations, communities, industries, nations, and individuals. Given the sometimes harsh reality facing many in today's volatile economy, we have looked at the impact that being made redundant has on individuals. Does it irrevocably damage their self-esteem? What does it mean for their future careers? And can being laid off actually improve individuals' overall health and well-being?

This last point may sound counter-intuitive, but do not underestimate the power of change. It is easy to think of losing a job as overwhelmingly negative, but our research indicates that the disruptive effect – the “jolt” - of job loss can also be a catalyst for positive change. This type of jolt has the potential to shake people out of inertia, forcing them to discard the old and focus attention on the new.

## RESEARCH QUESTION & FINDINGS

To investigate the psychological consequences of job loss, we interviewed professionals who had lost their jobs in the past year and asked them open-ended questions both about how losing their jobs had affected them and how they were approaching the search for new employment.

Four key themes emerged - three of the themes were clearly tied to a desire for increased authenticity. We define authenticity as being thoroughly genuine and honest with yourself and others about who you are and what you believe in as it relates to what you do both personally and professionally. Said another way, authenticity is knowing and living by your values.

While we cannot generalize across all populations nor can we assume value similarity among our respondents, our data suggest that what makes a job *good* is determined by the individual holding that job. In this case, good is defined as consistent with individuals' values and goals as opposed to just *being employed*. Moreover, good could be, and actually was, described as aligned with who respondents were, what they valued, and how they wanted to spend their work and non-work time. By and large, the layoff ignited the respondents' search for authenticity.

## FOUR KEY THEMES

### Lifestyle Quality:

For 50% of our respondents, there was a clear focus on the next job providing them with flexibility and the ability to spend quality time with family & friends. 42% focused on a desire to reduce the amount of work that they were previously doing as a component of their job.

### Meaningful Work:

92% defined their job search as having at least one of the key criteria related to finding meaningful work. 82% of those respondents literally used the words *meaningful work* or *meaningful opportunities* in their comments.

### Job Security and Happiness:

33% expressed a desire for happiness related to a new job. 50% of our respondents indicated their inextricable desire to feel stability and security. For 33%, this search for stability was so important that they were willing to trade off level of position and associated responsibility for a job with security & stability.

### Self-doubt and Cynicism:

50% of the respondents, the jolt of their respective layoffs sparked two types of negative reactions: 42% self-doubt 33% general cynicism about organizations and their future.

## CNN Article (excerpt)

### Lose your job, find yourself: Why redundancy might not be so bad

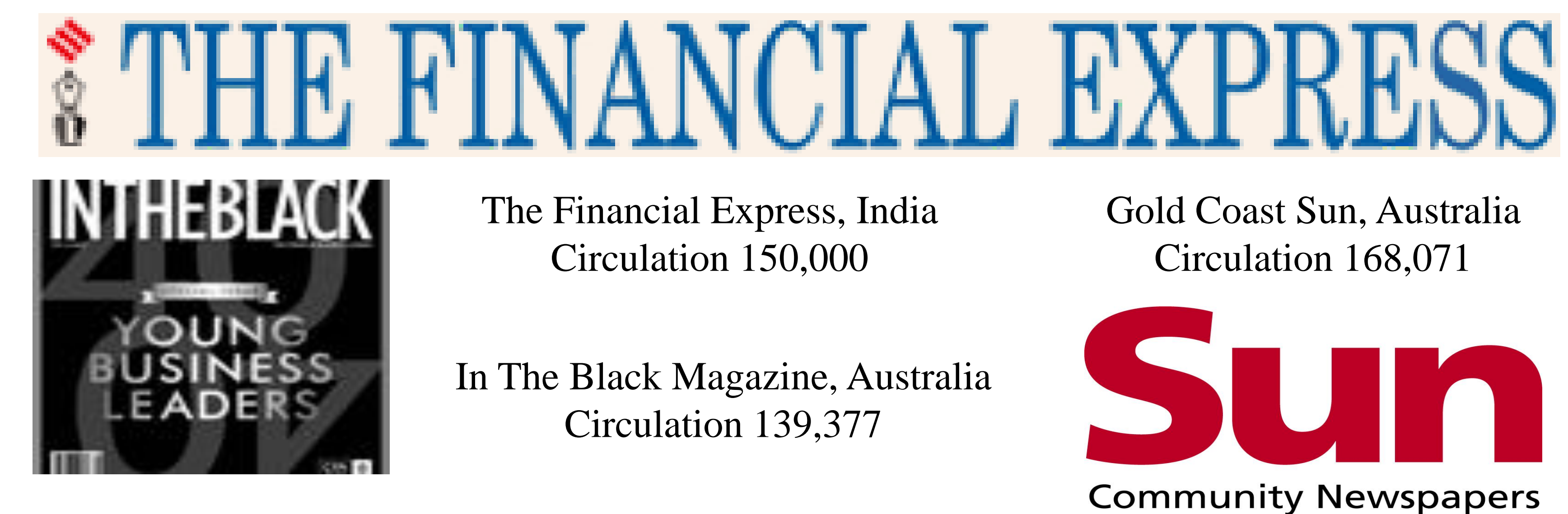
By **Tim Hume**, for CNN  
February 28, 2012



(CNN) -- There's no question that losing your job can be a jolting experience, as anyone who has had the misfortune of being laid off in recent years can attest. But what if that jolt could be a positive experience?

That's the suggestion to come out of recent research which looked into the experiences of laid-off mid-to senior-level managers in the United States and Australia.

## 2012 RESEARCH COVERAGE (EXS OF)



## Researchers



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